

Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and Your Little Sister: How Pop Culture Affects Our
Young Girls

An Honors Thesis (Honors 499)

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Marcy Meyer". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Marcy" written in a larger, more prominent script than the last name "Meyer".

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Abstract

In an effort to inform more people about the effects the media and popular culture have on our young children, I prepared and delivered a presentation that examines the media and its messages. Today's kids are viewing more television and advertisements than any generation before them. The media are often saturated with sexualized images, and exposure to objectifying messages can be linked to the negative self-esteem young girls have, as well as the growing number of eating disorders in young girls. This paper examines the research and findings that I used in my presentation, as well as the process that I went through to prepare for the presentation.

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Introduction

The images in today's popular media can be very destructive to the self-esteem of young girls. From images of teenage girls in skimpy skirts and midriff tops in magazines to the negative treatment of female television and movie characters who do not display themselves as sex objects, young girls are viewing these images in mass quantities and are making decisions that affect their lives based on the information they have received from the media.

The purpose of this thesis was to help inform my peers about the issues revolving around images of women in the media and the problems associated with these images. I wanted to open the eyes of other students who may not be aware of the effects media has on young children. Through presentations in the residence halls, I shared my research and my concerns with the members of Brady/Wood, Schmidt/Wilson, and Beeman/DeMotte hall councils. This paper examines the research and findings that I used in my presentation, as well as the process that I went through to prepare and deliver the presentation.

The Issue

As a woman in today's society, I have often felt that the media pressures us to appear and to act in a certain manner. As an adult, I have seen in retrospect the effect that media had on my actions during my pre-teen and teenage years. As a cousin, a friend, a sister, and a babysitter, I have seen how young girls today are affected by the images in the media. These instances in my personal life concerned me, and I wanted to do something to change what I was observing happening around me.

Today, American children are exposed to significant amounts of media, all which contains messages about what it means to be a woman or a man. According to Jean Kilbourne in her documentary, "Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising Images of Women," American children view over 3,000 advertisements every single day (Jhally, 2002). These same children will also spend more time watching TV each year than they do in school (Gibbons, 2004, p148). Not only are children being exposed to more media today than at any point in the past, they are also being exposed to media meant for audiences that are much more mature. According to Valkenburg, 80% of programs that are viewed by 12 year olds are actually intended for adults (2004, p5), and 80% of third grade girls listed an adult program as her favorite (2004, p34). These numbers are alarming, and combined with a vulnerable and developing personality, they are dangerous.

To fully understand the effects the media has on children and how media messages are being perceived, we need to examine how young children, specifically girls, process these images and how they put the images to use in developing their full selves. Young children are constantly undergoing the process of identity development and formation, in which the child will use information from her life along with the images she views in the media to form her identity and self-concept. Whereas in the past the family was the strongest influence over a child's identity development, the media has begun to replace it. A study conducted in the 1930s found that children viewed their parents, teachers, and even historical figures like Abraham Lincoln as their role models and those in which they would most like to resemble; however, studies done in the 1990s showed that children most want to be like "fantasy" figures, such as actors, singers, models, and sport stars (Gibbons, 2004, p7). Another study done in 1995 found that the introduction

of television coincided with the switch from children looking at parents and family members as primary role models to celebrities (Gibbons, 2004, p149).

Given that studies have shown that the media does play a role in a child's development process, with young children everywhere purchasing clothing resembling that of celebrities and imitating those same celebrities on the playgrounds, it is important for us as responsible members of society to take notice of the messages that these children are picking up through the media they view. One of the strongest messages being sent to our young children is that women are supposed to look a certain way – they should be tall, thin, have larger breasts, long hair, sexy, and be perfectly made-up. This message is very consistent across media – television, movies, magazines, music: All of the images we see of women are the same.

Television and movies are extra-dangerous because they not only contain images of the cookie-cutter model that happens to be young and hyper-sexualized, they also contain dialogue and actions to reinforce the message that women are supposed to look and act a certain way. For example, female characters are often praised for looking a certain way and treated negatively if they do not (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004, p49).

Magazines are another very dangerous medium for young girls and their self-esteem. *Seventeen*, a magazine that describes itself as the “best friend of high school girls,” is a main contributor in the media of sending messages to young girls about what it means to be a girl. With a circulation of 1.75 million, this magazine has the potential to affect the decisions made by young girls everyday – what to wear, ways to primp before leaving home in the morning, how to act, and what to say (Martin, 1999, p169). A 1998 study of the contents of *Seventeen* found that less than half of the articles in the magazine

discussed topics related to self and career development. The large majority of the articles revolved around appearances, dieting, and relationships (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004, p42). Another study found that 78% of the teasers listed on the covers of magazines meant for young girls and women were in reference to appearance, dieting, and relationships. However, none of the teasers on the covers of magazines meant for men referenced these topics (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004, p43). If we examine these findings, along with many other studies that show that children are influenced by the media they view and do look to celebrities for appearance and behavior cues, then it is clear that something needs to be done to change this cycle (Gibbons, 2004, p149).

So who are these role models in the media, and what is it that they are doing that can be so detrimental to the health and well being of young girls? A small, partial list would include Lindsay Lohan, Britney Spears, Paris Hilton, Mandy Moore, Hilary Duff, and the Olsen twins. These girls, all of whom are still very young, fit the description listed above: tall, thin, and hyper-sexualized. A couple of the girls have even been rumored to have breast implants. Interestingly enough, these celebrities and the other models that young girls try to look like have body types that are virtually unachievable; a body type that only 5% of women can achieve genetically (Jhally, 2002). Young girls try to look like these women, only most cannot even diet into this body type. However, the body type of these models is not always natural: Many have either had plastic surgery or the images have been airbrushed (Jhally, 2002).

These images are very dangerous to young girls, as well as young boys. First off, many of these models, while being viewed as beautiful and sexually attractive, are not healthy. One-third of the models in *Playboy* have reached the World Health

Organization's standard for anorexia nervosa (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004, p43), and the average model is a size 0-2 (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004, p128). Children are constantly seeing images of these thin women, and they are attempting to diet into this body type. Whereas the average height and weight of a model is 5'11" and 110 lbs, the average height and weight of American women is 5'4" and 145 lbs. There is obviously a disparity here, and it has become hazardous to the health of our young girls (Ericsson, 2000).

After examining the information regarding images of women in the media, we need to examine specifically how these messages are affecting children. Many studies have shown that media exposure significantly influences body dissatisfaction, and can be linked to the development of eating disorders (e.g., Ericsson, 2000). One in five women have a clinical eating disorder; close to 4:5 women have an attitude disorder towards food (Jhally, 2002); the number one wish of young girls is to be thinner (Ericsson, 2000). Other studies show that many young girls have already attempted to lose weight. Regarding these images of thin, hyper-sexualized women, one study showed that 70% of women feel guilty within three minutes of looking at a fashion magazine (Ericsson, 2000). These women, who might be physically healthy and in shape, feel guilty and depressed because they don't feel adequate next to the images they are seeing on the pages of the magazine. Sadly, some studies have shown that young girls who look at these magazines are more likely to use extreme dieting methods to lose weight than their peers who do not look at magazines (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004, 129).

Another message that young girls are getting from media images is that they need to behave in a sexual manner in order to receive positive attention. The effect that these

messages have had on our teenagers has been detrimental. One study showed that in 1950, less than 5% of 15 year old girls had engaged in sexual activity, but in 1997, more than 35% of girls had. This study has also shown that the average age for a girl to engage in sex is 16 (Ericsson, 2000). This has become a problem because of the number of STDs and unplanned teen pregnancies that occur today. Even more disturbing is that 70% of girls wish they had waited longer before first engaging in sex (Brown, 2006). With statistics like these, and with media portraying young women as hyper-sexualized objects, it is difficult not to believe that there is a connection between the two.

The Solution - Ideas for Improvement

While examining all of this research, I began to wonder what it is that can be done about these images. I began formulating ideas based on the information at hand, and realized that independent thinking is the key to success. Many of the studies I looked at discussed the correlation between the amount of media one views and that person's capability to think for herself. It is important for one to be an independent thinker for many reasons, but specifically applied towards images in the media, it is important so that a person can ensure that she will not be manipulated by advertisers. A person who is strong and independent has the necessary tools to stand up for her beliefs. This person would not feel pressured to act or dress a certain way – rather, this person would be comfortable being who she wants to be and would not be concerned with or affected by others' opinions – including that of the media.

It is also important for children to examine what it is that they want out of life. If they set goals and build up a support system to help them accomplish these goals, then children will not be as vulnerable when they are faced with peer pressure and have to

make decisions (e.g., a child who sets a goal to remain drug free is much more capable of saying “no” when offered drugs than the child who has not set a goal regarding substance use).

In my research, I came across a few easy tips to counter these destructive images in the media. First, we need to encourage our young girls to play sports and continue with them as they grow up and go through puberty. Many girls participate in sports during early childhood, but the majority drop out once they hit puberty, fearing that they will not be seen as “the right kind of girl.” However, the few girls who do continue to play sports are less likely to be affected by the images in the media because they see their body as functioning for them to remain active and stay healthy – not an object for someone else’s viewing pleasure (Ericsson, 2000).

The second tip is to get young girls involved in volunteer work. Girls who help out in their community see that there are more important issues that need to be dealt with than what dress to wear and whether or not Bobby likes them. These girls tend to have their priorities straight and see issues of image and appearance as shallow, making them less vulnerable to the images in the media (Ericsson, 2000).

A third tip I came across was to stop praising our girls for their appearance. As a society, we are more likely to comment on how cute a little girl is than we are to comment about the looks of a little boy. This teaches girls from early on that it is important to look a certain way and that appearance is the way to gain attention and approval. If we begin to compliment our young girls on their accomplishments as opposed to their appearances, we should begin to see a change in the attitudes of these girls in regards to their self-esteem (Etaugh & Bridges, 2004).

Finally, there was a quote from the film version of “Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls,” that I found very inspirational. This quote is located on the last slide of my PowerPoint presentation, and it is what I wanted to leave my audience with in hopes that it would inspire them. “Cultural change is a million acts of individual courage and kindness. That’s the only way our culture has ever changed and it’s the only way it will change.” I hope that my presentation was one of those small acts of courage that hopefully inspired and influenced my audience. If so, hopefully they will make the changes mentioned above in the lives of their children, and maybe one day we will have made a change. At the least, the research that I found helped renew my passion to continue to learn about gender issues, and I feel that I have been inspired by my own presentation to continue to inform my peers on the issue.

The Process

When the time came for me to choose a thesis topic, I spent weeks trying to find what I thought would be the perfect issue for me to tackle. I originally knew that I wanted to focus on a concern dealing with societal treatment of women, but what exactly did not come to me until the summer before my senior year. I was on leisure walk around campus with a friend, both of us brainstorming what I could do for my project. I had finally decided that I wanted to focus on the media, but I still needed clarification of what I would be researching. What actually came to me first was the title that I chose to use for this project: Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and Your Little Sister. My friend and I were discussing how children these days, especially young girls, do not have any positive role models in the media. I thought back to the summers that I spent babysitting a couple of pre-teenage girls from my hometown. The conversations they had focused

around Hilary Duff, Mandy Moore, Britney Spears, and Lindsay Lohan. They bought Hilary Duff's clothing from Kohl's; they belted Mandy Moore and Britney Spear's songs from the back seat of the car; they recounted every detail of Lindsay Lohan's new movie. These young girls were (and still are) consuming media and all of its messages uncritically. This concerns me because these girls are like my younger sisters, and I worry about them and how the messages they are receiving will affect them.

After developing this idea a little further, I started to seek out media that is popular among adolescent girls. To do this, I had conversations with the same girls mentioned above (who now are twelve) and I listened to what other young girls were saying in regards to the media they view. I noticed the celebrities on the covers each month of the magazines meant for pre-teen and teenage girls, such as *YM* and *Seventeen*. I flipped through the channels and took note of commercials and the celebrities endorsing products that appeared to target young girls. I listened to the radio to find out what music was popular among this age group. All of these methods, combined with my own input on the list of celebrities whom my friends and I considered role models when I was growing up, led to an extensive base of information that I would continue to reference when doing my research.

When the time came to start searching for primary research that looked at how images in the media affected the development of young girls, I had some difficulty. My first five searches of the resources in Bracken Library and on the Internet came up barren. I tried many different wordings, but I was not finding anything of any substance. I began to become frustrated with my work and wondered if my presentation was going to be a success. However, I thankfully completed a successful search of the library's card

catalogue. I discovered many resources that were very helpful in my research, including two films and a television series that gave me specific examples of media to cite during my presentation.

I started by collecting data that I thought would be interesting to discuss during my presentation. These tidbits of information were later compiled together on my data information sheet, in which I divided all facts into seven categories. These categories were “Girls and their media viewing habits,” “Girls and their role models,” “The media and its messages,” “Role models in the media,” “Negative Effects,” “How boys are also affected,” and “What we can do / changes for the future.” I chose these categories because I felt that they all were necessary to approach the topic from every angle. The category that discussed how boys are affected was added in later on when I decided that I didn’t want to give the impression that this is merely a woman’s issue and problem to deal with. I also wanted the men in the audience to feel included and realize that they play just as much a role in this issue as the women.

After collecting all of my data, I created my PowerPoint with the information that I thought would be most helpful in transmitting my message to my audience. I then started an internet search for images to place into the slides. This was a very important part of my process since the entire project is discussing these images and how they affect our children. To find the images, I went to www.google.com and used the image search option to locate pictures of the celebrities I listed above as role models of our young girls. First thing that should be noted is that I had my internet options set to a moderate child protection setting. This means that the internet server would not allow any web pages with questionable images to be viewed. However, many of the images and web sites that

did come up in a basic search contained images that most parents would not be comfortable with their child seeing. Some of the web sites contained advertisements for pornography and phone sex; others contained pictures of the celebrities that had been photo-shopped to make it appear that the celebrity was either naked or making a lewd gesture. I find this disconcerting because children today are efficient in technology and are capable of performing basic image searches. Some of the pictures I used for my presentation were taken from fan club web sites constructed by teenage girls. They are performing the image searches and then choosing images to reproduce on their own web pages for other girls and boys to see. This proves that young girls do have the knowledge and capability to view these images. In addition, many children probably have the knowledge to know how to remove the child protection setting from their internet server.

To arrange for my presentations, I sent a short letter to every Hall Council President on campus offering my service, and a letter to every Residence Hall Director informing them of the offer I made to each of their hall councils. Four halls responded and I set up dates during the month of March. Accounts of each presentation can be found in the journal included in Appendix A. Unfortunately, my fourth and final presentation never happened because of a communication error made by the hall council member who asked me to speak.

Conclusion

Working on this thesis has taught me a lot. I learned researching skills, time management, public speaking skills, as well as hordes of information about images of women in the media and its effect on young children. Most importantly, I learned what it means to be passionate about an issue and how good it feels to share that passion with

others. On the nights when members of the audience would come up to me afterwards to shake my hand and tell me what a wonderful presentation it was and how much they learned, I could barely contain my joy. I would go home and debrief by writing in my thesis journal, all the while smiling from ear to ear. It feels good to know that you may just have helped change a life, which may in turn change the lives of others who come into contact with that first person.

I feel that I have made an impact on the lives of the students that attended my presentations, which will hopefully impact the lives of future generations of children. My goal was to help start a chain effect that could eventually make a difference in our society. If I opened the eyes of even ten students who may one day have families and children, who then grow up and become parents themselves, then one day all of these lives that contained small changes would become one large change. Again, the quote from *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls* that so inspired me was “Cultural change is a million acts of individual courage and kindness. That’s the only way our culture has ever changed and it’s the only way it will change.” And that is just what I hope I have accomplished.

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Appendix A

Journal

December 27, 2005

I began looking over some of the texts I picked up from the library today. I had a lot of difficulty finding sources that looked at pop culture and media's negative images of women and stereotypical roles. I'm hoping the handful of sources I did find will leave me with some good information and with a more direct path for how I will present my findings. I have two very contradicting fears: one is that I will find no useful information and will be scrounging just to find enough to present; my second fear is that I'll find so much information I'll have a horrible time keeping my presentation short (I am thinking 15 minutes – I don't want to take up too much of the Hall Council's time, and I think the more direct and simple I am the more of an impact I will make.)

December 30, 2005

I wrote a letter to send to all Hall Council presidents on campus. I am thinking I will probably write a complimentary letter to send to the Hall Council Advisors just in case the presidents throw away the letter without reading it. I am hoping to get at least five responses, so if this first batch of letters doesn't work out, I am going to make some calls to some contacts of mine from when I worked in Housing and Residence Life.

Scheduling these events is kind of nerve racking for me because I do not have control over whom or how many invite me to speak.

January 10, 2006

We need to help our youth, and ourselves, think independently! This is the only way to conquer the issues that are being created by the images in the media. This is the only way to conquer the peer pressure that is being created in middle schools and high schools all across the country. I realized this while reading the beginning of *Advertising to Children*.

I've decided that some of the information I came across while working on my class project for Sociology 333 – Society and the Media, will be helpful for me to make my point about the negative impact these images have. I think I may also use images from popular magazines. I like Jean Kilbourne's approach in "Killing Us Softly 3," where she explains the messages behind each advertisement. I've also decided that I want to state to the audience how the pressure is still there for men, just not as prevalent. I'm doing this because I don't want to alienate the men or make them feel that I am blaming them.

Side note – I just thought of how Lindsay Lohan, who is probably one of the most popular teen stars right now (the little girls I baby-sit for love her), recently was in the news quite a bit for her drug problems and eating disorders. Is this the person we want our young girls admiring? The Olsen Twins have also been in the media a lot because of drug and eating disorder problems. There seems to be a trend...

I am very disappointed with the amount of work I did over break. Now that I'm back, it's time to crack down on this thing and really make it happen. I think I'm finding some really important information – it's making all the information connect that worries me.

I'm going to be sending out the letters to all of the Hall Council's and directors in the next couple of days. I hope to have about five Hall Council's scheduled by the beginning of February. March is less than two months away! YIKES!

January 13, 2006

Okay, Friday the 13th! I have just a little over a month to get everything organized and ready for my presentation. That's kind of odd to think about since I've been planning this project since last April! I have all the letters printed and signed, so they should be in campus mail this afternoon. I'm hoping to do some more research this weekend, and finish my gathering of data by February 1st so I can then start working on my PowerPoint presentation. I also got the VHS version of "Reviving Ophelia." I plan on watching that this weekend. That's all for now!

Notes from "Reviving Ophelia"

- We live in a dysfunctional culture that is poisonous and a girl hurting culture
- Girls need to feel that they can think clearly and feel what they feel without being punished or teased or hurt
- Teenagers are encouraged to distance themselves from their parents (parents should be role models, but instead, teens don't want them around)
- Within 3 minutes of looking at fashion magazines, 70% of women feel guilty, ashamed, and depressed
- The average height and weight of a fashion model – 5'11" and 110 lbs.
- The average height and weight of an American woman – 5'4" and 145 lbs.
- Models have become thinner over the past 20 years but cannot continue to get thinner because they would then be so unhealthy they would not be able to work
- By defining beauty so unnaturally, girls do unnatural things to be beautiful
- #1 wish of girls: To be thinner
- Women are valued in the media for their sexuality – this affects young teenagers by teaching them that it is important for them to be sexually attractive. Those who don't feel sexy feel bad about themselves and feel like they are left out of something that is very important
- In 1970, less than 5% of 15 year old girls had engaged in sex

- 1997, more than 31% of 15 year old girls had engaged in sex
- Over 50% of teens wished they had waited long to have sex (*my psychology book says 70% of girls wish they had waited longer*)
- To protect themselves from pressures, young girls need to decide what they want and what they are ready for (*this related back to my idea and key point that teens need to learn to think independently*)
- Girls need to learn who they are so they are not as vulnerable to peer pressures
- Boys also need better role models than the macho movie heroes available to them
- Boys report that the most important thing in a date is physical attractiveness
- Boys need to compliment their girlfriends on things other than appearance and need to learn not to make fun of 'ugly' girls
- It's important for girls to keep doing what they did when they were younger
- They need to think of their bodies as functioning, not just something to look at
- Teach our kids to get involved in good causes because it makes them think that they can make a difference and takes their minds off physical appearance (this puts things in perspective and makes the normal teenage issues seem shallow)
- We need to praise girls for their character and achievements, not their 'cuteness'
- The more TV and magazines a girl views, the more likely she is to have an eating disorder
- "Cultural change is a million acts of individual courage and kindness. That's the only way our culture has ever changed, and it's the only way it will change."
- We are all "change agents" and we can work every day to make a better culture just by paying attention to our interactions with each other and the messages we are sending

I was able to get a lot of good information from the film version of "Reviving Ophelia."

I had wanted to read the book, but all of the copies were already checked out from the library. However, the movie was a great resource. I really liked the last couple quotes and ideas that were presented. I think that these points are the exact points I am trying to make.

January 19, 2006

Tonight I received my first response about my presentation from a hall director. It wasn't a request for the presentation, but it was an email saying that he would ask his hall council to consider the program. So at least now I know my letters are starting to arrive! Hopefully in the next week or so I'll have a few presentations scheduled. I'm starting to

get a little nervous about all of this. I hope my presentation is interesting and I hope everything goes smoothly! I have a friend who is going to lend me some of her old magazines, so soon I'll start pulling actually media into my research. I was also thinking of doing a section on real heroes and role models, just a slide or two, to keep the presentation personal. My role model is Eleanor Roosevelt – an amazing lady, but nothing like the images the media tries to sell us today! I also hope to talk to a couple of 12 year old girls that I use to baby-sit and find out who they want to be like and if there are any celebrities or media figures they take their cues from. I know they love Hilary Duff!

While looking for pictures I came across

http://www.geocities.com/we_love_lindsay/?200619 a website made by a 15 year old and a 19 year old who say that Lindsay Lohan is their role model. It was pretty interesting... and this proves that young girls do in fact see these media icons as role models.

January 22, 2006

I've been doing internet searches to find pictures of celebrities that I think are pretty popular among girls, and I am quite shocked at some of the pictures I am finding. First, I've only used Google searches to find my pictures – something simple and easy that any kid today would know how to find by navigating the internet to find these images. Second, I've found some very questionable photos of these celebrities, and I've done all of my searching with the 'moderate security' setting on, which means that Google has supposedly filtered out any profane image. I imagine that most parents have this setting

on the computer and trust that it will stop questionable pictures from showing up. Third, I only pulled out the questionable photos of the actual celebrities – many of the images were of random women who claimed to look like a celebrity. Most of these pictures were very questionable. So now you may understand why I was so shocked and concerned with my findings.

January 24, 2006

Notes from Killing Us Softly 3: Advertising Images of Women:

- Advertising in 1979 = \$20 billion / a year business
- Advertising in 1999 = \$180 billion / a year business
- Americans view 3000 ads a day
- Americans spend 3 years of their lives watching TV commercials
- Ads sell more than products
- Girls' self-esteem plummets at puberty (not so for boys)
- The body type of models and celebrities is something only 5% of women have (usually they have small breasts – if they are large then they are usually implants)
- 1:5 American women have clinical eating disorders (this does not include those with attitude problems towards eating – would then be 4:5 women)

February 1, 2006

Well, I think things are going smoothly with scheduling of presentations. I currently have two presentations confirmed and one hall that is double checking the date they want the presentation. I wanted to do a couple more, so if I don't hear from others by Friday, I'll be sending out a second request. I'm hoping for four or five halls in total. I have also had quite a bit of homework for my other classes the past two weeks that deals with images of women in the media, so I think right now I have an overload of information! In the next couple of weeks, I'm going to have to organize the information into some manner that makes sense. I have a bit more time than I had expected to prepare my

presentation because I realized that the first week of March is our spring break. Well, time to get back to the books!

February 10, 2006

Okay, it's getting closer to crunch time. Time to start formulating my ideas into complete thoughts and organizing my data into categories so I can make the PowerPoint.

Topics I believe I will be discussing are:

- Girls and their media viewing habits
- Girls and their role models
- The media and the messages it sends
- Role models in the media
- Negative affects of the media's messages
- How boys are affected by these images
- Things we can do and changes for the future

I would also like to come up with some sort of activity to do with my audience, but I'm not sure what I'll do yet...

* 80% of programs viewed by 12 year old girls is media meant for adults (Valkenburg)

February 22, 2006

I did a few more photo searches, and this is what I found:

- I was actually forbidden to view multiple sites based on the content of the page – however, I was still able to see the questionable images on the search results page.
- Pages contained images of celebrities that had been photo-shopped. This means that there are pictures of celebrities naked or in questionable poses, even if the celebrity never had these pictures taken.
- One of the sites had an ad on it that read, "Find real sex partners in Muncie now!"
- Many of the websites actually had advertisements for pornography on them.

February 24, 2006

Time is starting to run out, and I'm very pleased with how things are going. I have three halls scheduled, and one in the process of choosing a date. I have my information gathered and my PowerPoint almost fully put together (I'm finishing it tonight.) and I have a meeting scheduled with my advisor to go over the information. I also have a friend looking over the PowerPoint to make sure it looks snazzy! I know I'm a little behind the schedule I originally set, but I'm still okay on time. In fact, I'm probably further along than most people would be. I always set ridiculous schedules for myself so that, even with some procrastination, I will finish early.

Last night I was looking for pictures for my PowerPoint (which has sadly become one of my new favorite hobbies – and its very time consuming!) and I realized that not all of the role models for young girls have been completely exploited. This gave me a little hope! The actresses who began with the Disney Channel (with the exception of Lindsay Lohan) are still having what I consider appropriate pictures taken for their publicity. This includes actresses like Hilary Duff and Raven. But those who are both admired by young girls and teenagers (both girls and boys) and young 20 somethings have been sexualized to a grotesque point (for example, Britney Spears and Jessica Simpson). Lindsay Lohan is the one who stumps me. She posed for pictures in risqué magazines and sells herself as a sex symbol, and then she continues to make 'family films' and those meant for young girls like "The Love Bug," "Mean Girls," and "True Confessions of a Teenage Drama Queen." All of her movies have been targeted towards young adolescent girls.

Though I was happy not to find questionable photos of all the girls I deemed as role models, it must be realized that photographs are only a small way in which images of thin, sexualized girls are presented in the media, and probably not even the most

damaging. TV and movies not only show these images, but they also have actions and reactions to reinforce its messages. There are shows where fat girls are treated badly and they also tell us what the 'right' kind of girl is like – we don't have to figure it out on our own by looking at photographs.

March 6, 2006

One week and I'll be presenting! I've got my PowerPoint almost completely done (there is always room for improvement, right?) and I've practiced my presentation a couple of times. Now its just about cleaning things up and making my transitions more crisp.

When I met with my advisor the other day, we discussed some of my concerns about either offending or upsetting particular members of my audience. Her advice helped settle my fears. It's always good to know that others don't find your presentation offensive! She told me to ask the audience to open their minds for the presentation and see things from a different perspective. I want the audience to realize that this presentation is not about pointing fingers and blaming anyone – it's about inspiring change.

I know it's difficult for me to view media without a critical eye or to not view it through the lens of feminist theory, and I'm not asking the audience to change everything that they know and is familiar to them in one night. Instead, I am asking them to consider my arguments and suggestions as a way to improve the problems in our society. I wish I had more time to present, but I'm afraid that I'll loose the audience if I go longer than 10 minutes. More than anything, I wish I could have one on one time with everyone to sit down and have a conversation about the issues – this way I could get feedback on how

others view issues of images in the media and how others react to my arguments. But I guess I'll just have to settle for this format and hope that with my presentation I can plant a small seed!

March 13, 2006

Okay, so presentation #1 is over! After some stressing about how to get the projector hooked up to the computer, I finally calmed down and realized that I was ready! The presentation at Brady/Wood went wonderfully, except that it was almost a half-hour long! I guess I just have too much I can say on the topic (I actually have about twenty resources I didn't even get around to using because I already had more than enough information). The girls all responded well to the facts and seemed to be interested in what I had to say (but it was difficult to tell because someone turned out the lights in order to see the presentation better). There was a little audience participation, but not nearly as much discussion as I would have liked. I think this was a good starting point and I have some ideas on ways to improve.

March 15, 2006

Presentation #2 is finished! I was very pleased with the outcome of things last night. The presentation itself ran fairly smoothly, and the students were very receptive. They seemed genuinely interested, and they actually laughed at my jokes! There were close to 30 students attending Schmidt/Wilson's hall council that night (I was nervous at first about how well I would do in front of such a large group, but it seemed like the more audience members, the better the presentation was). After the presentation, I asked if

anyone had questions or comments, but I wasn't expecting anything. However, this group had quite a bit to say! The girls made comments that reaffirmed what I had to say. One girl shared with us how comments boys make about her are influential, and how she would much rather be complemented on things she has accomplished and not necessarily on how she looks (she said, "When I'm dressed up, you don't need to tell me that I look good – cause I already know!"). Some of the boys questioned the studies I used in my presentation, but not to disregard the issue – rather, the guys were curious to look at the research from all sides in order to have the most accurate information to help them formulate an informed opinion. One guy asked about what he thought was contradicting studies in my presentation (one study saying that girls emulate these media characters with another study by the AAUW that showed that teen girls recognize the pressure media puts on girls to be perfect). Others shared stories from their lives that affirmed my message. It was a great feeling. I think I really got through to this group!

March 22, 2006

Last night was presentation #3 at Beeman/Demotte hall council. I had lots of fun computer problems before hand (thank goodness I always arrive at least 20 minutes early) and I felt that my speaking abilities were not completely up to par, but I think I really got through to some of the people. There wasn't a great discussion afterwards like at Schmidt/Wilson, but I did have about ten people come up to me afterwards and tell me how much they enjoyed the presentation. So far, it seems like the purpose behind the presentation is making its way into the minds of others, and I just may be achieving my goal of bringing light to these issues in the minds of others who maybe don't concern

themselves with women's issues on an everyday basis. Boy, that was a long thought! Anyway, I give my last presentation tomorrow night, and I'm sort of sad to see it end. I've really enjoyed my interactions with others and getting to share my passion with my peers. Hopefully tomorrow night I'll go out with a bang!

March 24, 2006

Last night was so upsetting. I got my projector and computer from the library, got set up in the Multipurpose room of Studebaker West complex, realized that I needed an extension cord because there was not a good place to plug in the projector, spent 15 minutes bugging friends in the hall trying to find one, finally found something that would work, finished setting up, and then I realized that no one was coming. Apparently there had been some miscommunication between the halls multicultural chairperson who invited me to speak and the rest of the hall. Or maybe it wasn't a miscommunication, but rather a lack of communication. Apparently in a staff meeting the night before I was supposed to come speak, one of the resident assistants told the rest of the staff that I was coming to present. This was the first time anyone else on staff had heard of the presentation, and unfortunately, three of the female resident assistants had already scheduled other programs for the same time as my program. This meant that not only were there four events going on that night that would have to divide the number of people who would be attending, but no one even knew about my event!

First I was angry that I had wasted so much time preparing for that presentation. Then I was made that the girl in charge wasn't prepared. She also never said anything to me about the program and no one showing. I just decided to leave at 9:25 after I had waited around for over half an hour. As I was walking back to the library and I was starting to

cool down, I realized what really upset me was that I didn't get to share what I had to say with this group of students. The whole purpose of this project was so I could open the eyes of my peers – but to do this they actually have to be at the presentation!

Appendix B
Data Collection

GIRLS AND THEIR MEDIA VIEWING HABITS

We see 3000 advertisements a day, and will spend 3 years of our life watching TV commercials (Killing Us Softly 3)

**40% of programs viewed by 6-7 year olds are actually intended for adults, and
80% of programs viewed by 12 year olds are actually intended for adults
(Valkenburg p5)**

80% of third grade girls listed and adult program as her favorite (Valkenburg p. 34)

Kids who watch adult TV programming gain social status among peers (Valkenburg p.5)

8-12 years olds prefer to watch actors who are teens or young adults because they say these actors are involved in more “interesting and exciting activities.” (Valkenburg p. 33)
They also look to them as cues for what adults look and act like.

Adolescents in the US spend more time watching TV each year than they do in school. (Gibbons p. 148)

Adolescents use media as to help with identity formation. It teaches them “how they are supposed to look, think, and act.” (Gibbons p.148)

GIRLS AND THEIR ROLE MODELS

Teenagers and adolescents are discouraged to spend time with their parents, and it is considered cool to disassociate with your parents. (Reviving Ophelia VHS)

Children ages 8-12 identify with “realistic” figures in the media, such as film stars, sports heroes, and realistic action figures (not cartoons anymore) (Valkenburg p.31)

Children who wishfully identify with admirable characters in the media feel more powerful when they are faced with difficult problems in their lives (Valkenburg p. 31)

Adolescents live in the present and the future, constantly thinking about who they want to become. (Gibbons p.2) – This combined with the info that they watch and idealize media characters can explain how it is dangerous for them to see the unrealistic images... they are deciding that they want to be like these characters.

“Most adolescents held idealistic visions of their parents, their friends, and their future selves.” (Gibbons 4)

Identity Development – “adolescents may admire, idolize, or emulate others as part of the process of identity development.” (Gibbons p.5) These children are trying to decide who they are and who they will become, and the media (and society) definitely shape these ideas with images of unrealistic ‘ideal’ people. They are comparing themselves with characters that have been fabricated and created in the minds of Hollywood’s top writers.

In 1930 a study of Alabama adolescents found that their lists of role models were made up of historical figures like Abraham Lincoln and George Washington, and of personal figures like parents and teachers. A study in the 1990’s found that young children were likely to choose their parents and teachers as role models, but as adolescents became older, they were more likely to choose fantasy role models (sports figures, actors, such as Michael Jordan). A possible cause for this would be the increase in Satellite TV and the World Wide Web. (Gibbons p. 7)

A study of children’s ideas of the most ideal and worst possible woman in the US came out with these results: the worst possible woman would not be up-to-date in fashion; she would be emotionally disturbed; she would be self-determined but instead defers to men and lacks opinions and self-assertion; she would be unemployed or lacking in ambition; she gossips and is selfish, unkind, unfriendly, mean, and violent. (Gibbons p. 93) *This is a fairly complete and good list... However, the first characteristic mentioned does not fit with the others and is worrisome to me. This study also found that characteristics applied to the ‘worst possible woman’ included fat, bad grooming, and wears polyester.*

While boys are more likely to admire sports stars, girls are more likely to admire rock stars. (Gibbons p.149)

A study in 1995 found that the introduction of television coincided with the switch from children looking at parents and family members as primary role models to celebrities. (Gibbons p.149)

Studies show that teenagers who conform to the norms of their peer group tend to have less skepticism towards advertising than those who don't conform and therefore think for themselves. (Macklin p. 11)

Those girls with lower self esteem and those who think they are not physically attractive tend to compare themselves to models in ads more than those girls who have a high self-esteem. (Macklin p. 170)

THE MEDIA AND ITS MESSAGES

Media puts more emphasis on appearance for women than for men. (Macklin p. 169)

***Seventeen* magazine was “referred to as the ‘best friend’ of high school girls. With a total circulation of 1.75 million, *Seventeen* has the potential to influence a substantial proportion of the adolescent female population.” (Macklin p. 169)**

A 1998 study of *Seventeen* magazine found that only 40% of the articles fell into the topics of self and career development. The large majority dealt with appearance and relationships. (Etaugh & Bridges p. 42)

***Please realize that Ads sell more than products – they tend to have subtle messages about what our society sees as acceptable**

Girls interviewed about the media and its effects on women say that it sends the message and pressure to the girls that they need to be perfect. (AAUW p.11)

A study of magazine covers in 1996 found that 78% of popular magazines for women had teasers to articles in the magazine about appearance, diet and exercise, where as none of the popular magazines for men mentioned articles dealing with appearance, diet and exercise. (Etaugh & Bridges p. 43)

ROLE MODELS IN THE MEDIA

Lindsey Lohan
 The Olsen Twins
 Britney Spears
 Paris Hilton
 Amanda Bines
 Mandy Moore
 Hilary Duff
 Katie Holmes
 Julia Stiles
 Kirsten Dunst

Average height and weight of models: 5'11" and 110 lbs. (models have gotten thinner over past 20 years but will not become any thinner because they would then not be healthy enough to work / Average height and weight of woman: 5'4" and 145 lbs. (Reviving Ophelia VHS)

In 1985 the average fashion model was a size 8, and in 2002 the average size was between a 0 and 2. (Etaugh & Bridges p. 128)

The body type that models and celebrities have can only be had by 5% of women – not a body type that a person can just ‘diet’ into. And if the model (who happens to be crazy tall and thin) happens to have large breast, they are almost always breast implants ... so really that body type cannot be reached by any woman in society. (Killing Us Softly 3)

1/3 of *Playboy* centerfold models meet the World Health Organization’s criteria for anorexia nervosa. (Etaugh & Bridges p. 43)

Many images of models have actually been retouched by computers, creating ‘perfect’ women who actually don’t exist as the ‘role model’ for young women to try and emulate. (AAUW p.1 & Killing Us Softly 3)

NEGATIVE EFFECTS

Media exposure significantly influences body dissatisfaction and the development of eating disorders.

-45% of girls and boys grades 3-6 have a desire to be thinner.

-37% have tried to lose weight.

-6.9% scored within the anorexia nervosa range.

-42% of girls grades 1-3 preferred thinner ideal figures than their own.

-52% of girls wanted to lose weight.

(These figures came from our Soc 333 intervention)

1:5 women have clinical eating disorders (this does not include those women who have some sort of attitude problem towards eating... otherwise would be closer to 4:5)

(Killing Us Softly 3)

“... children’s commercials may be one factor contributing to less than ideal eating attitudes and habits in females.” (Macklin p. 169)

W/in 3 minutes of looking at fashion magazines, 70% of women feel guilty, ashamed, and depressed – the more TV and magazines a girl is exposed to, the more likely she is to have an eating disorder (media images send the message that its important to be thin) (Reviving Ophelia VHS)

#1 wish of girls: To Be Thinner (Reviving...)

The media values sexy women, which teaches young girls that it’s important for them to be sexually attractive, and if the girl doesn’t happen to feel sexy, then she feels bad about herself and feels left out of something very important (Reviving...)

In 1950 less than 5% of 15 year old girls had engaged in sex, but in 1997, more than 35% had (and even more recent statistics say that the average age for a girl to begin engaging in sex is 16)... (Reviving...)

70% of girls wish they had waited longer before first having sex (Psych 324 notes)

Young girls who read popular fashion magazines are more likely to use extreme dieting methods than those who do not read them. (Etaugh & Bridges p. 129)

HOW BOYS ARE ALSO AFFECTED

Pressure is still there for men, but since it is Women's History Month, I'm focusing on the images of women -- however, these images of women also affect the men who see them.

Also: "The prevalence of this ideal (of attractiveness) has been demonstrated through studies showing that female adolescents are exposed to a greater number of messages and images in advertising related to physical attractiveness than male adolescents." (Macklin p. 168)... still, it is important to look at images of men in the media too.

Boys think that the most important thing in a date is physical attractiveness (learn from the media). (Reviving VHS)

Boys constantly see images of made-up women and also intake the messages from the media showing women who are attractive having a good life and those 'unattractive' women are teased and often are portrayed as the characters girls would not want to be. This leads guys to expect women in their lives (their girlfriends) to look a certain way. (AAUW p. 11)

THINGS WE CAN DO / CHANGES FOR THE FUTURE

We need to help our youth, and ourselves, think independently. This is the only way to conquer the issues that are being created by the images the media is sending us and the peer pressure that is being created in middle schools and high schools all across the country.

We need to help our young girls decide what it is they really want in life, so that way when they are faced with hard decisions and peer pressure, they won't be as vulnerable as a girl who has made up her mind about what she expects from herself.

Guys can help by complimenting their girlfriends and other female friends for things other than their physical appearance. Let a girl know that you think she did really well on an assignment, or that she made a good point in class today, or that you think it's nice how she has helped you in whatever way... (Reviving)

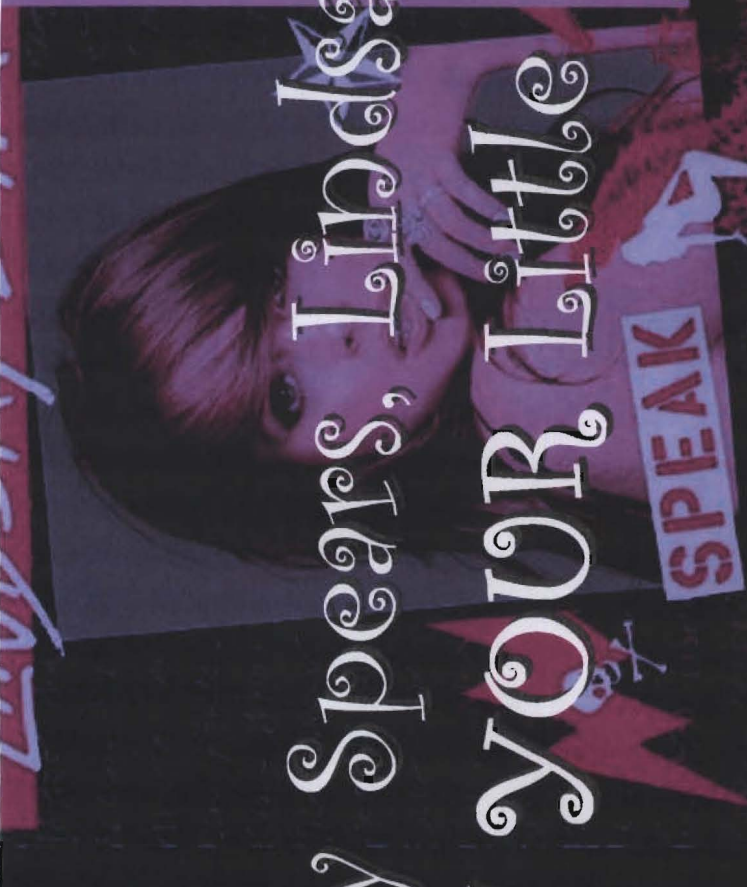
Younger girls don't have as many self-esteem issues as those going through puberty and adolescence. If she played a sport before puberty, continue to encourage her to play so she can realize that her body is functional... not just something to look at. (Reviving)

Girls who are involved in some sort of volunteer work tend to have fewer problems because helping others with serious problems makes the appearance issues seem shallow – working for a cause helps girls put things in perspective. (Reviving)

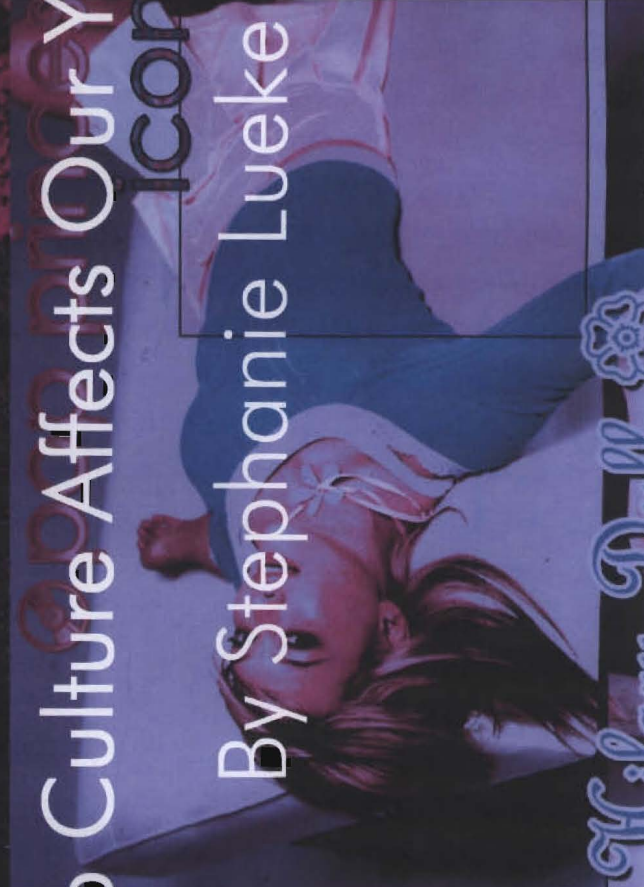
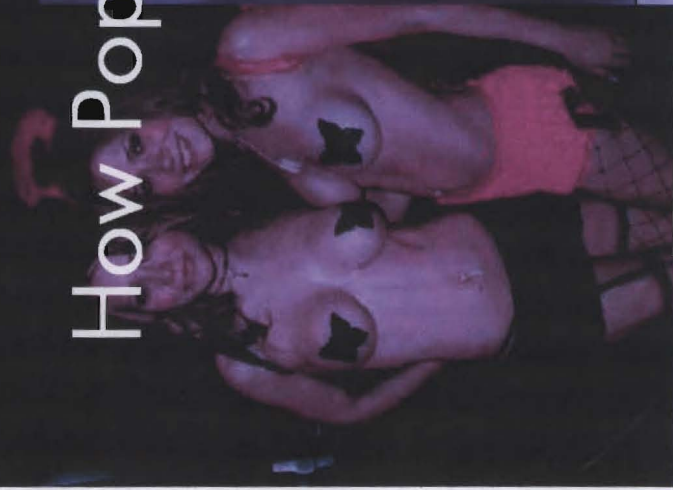
Stop praising girls only for their 'Cuteness'

***"Cultural change is a million acts of individual courage and kindness. That's the only way our culture has ever changed and it's the only way it will change."* (Reviving)**

We are all CHANGE AGENTS and we can work everyday to make a better culture just by paying attention to our interactions w/ each other and the messages we are sending.



Britney Spears, Lindsay Lohan, and YOUR Little Sister



How Pop Culture Affects Our Young Girls

By Stephanie Lueke

Icon

Our Role Models

- Who are your role models?
- When you were growing up, who did you want to become?
- Did you ever pretend to be someone famous? Did you ever wish you were friends with your favorite actress or singer?
- How did your 'celebrity' role models affect you and your actions?



Girls and Their Role Models



Identity Development -

- "Adolescents may admire, idolize, or emulate others as part of the process of identity development." (Gibbons p.3)
- The media (and society) definitely shape these ideas with images of unrealistic 'ideal' people.
- Children compare themselves with characters that have been fabricated and created in the minds of Hollywood's top writers.

Girls and Their Media Viewing Habits

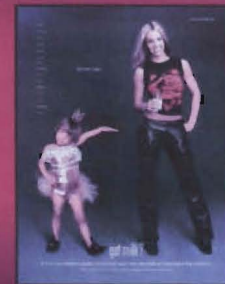
- Adolescents use media as a source to help with identity formation. It teaches them "how they are supposed to look, think, and act." (Gibbons p.148)
- We see 3000 advertisements a day, and will spend 3 years of our lives watching TV commercials (Killing Us Softly 3)
- Adolescents in the US spend more time watching TV each year than they do in school. (Gibbons p. 148)



Girls and Their Role Models (cont)

Parents

- Teenagers and adolescents are discouraged from spending time with their parents, and it is considered cool to disassociate from parents. (Reviving Ophelia VHS)
- In a 1930 study, a list of role models was made up of historical figures and of personal figures like parents and teachers.
- A study in the 1990's found that young children were likely to choose their parents and teachers as role models, but adolescents were more likely to choose fantasy role models (sports figures or actors, such as Michael Jordan). (Gibbons p. 7)



Girls and Their Media Viewing Habits (cont)

- 48% of programs viewed by 6-7 year olds are actually intended for adults
- 86% of programs viewed by 12 year olds are actually intended for adults
- 80% of third grade girls listed an adult program as her favorite
- Kids who watch adult TV programming gain social status among peers



(Children's Response to the Screen)

Girls and Their Role Models (cont)



Children's ideas of the worst possible woman in the US:

- would not be up-to-date in fashion
- emotionally disturbed
- self-determined but instead defers to men and lacks opinions and self-assertion
- unemployed or lacking in ambition; she gossip and is selfish, unkind, unfriendly, mean, and violent
- fat, bad grooming, and wears polyester (Gibbons p. 32)

The Media and its Message

Images of Women

- Media puts more emphasis on appearance for women than for men. (Macklin p. 169)
- Girls interviewed about the media and its effects on women say that it sends the message and pressure to the girls that they need to be perfect. (AAUW p. 11)
- Girls who have low self-esteem and think they are not attractive compare themselves to models in ads more than those girls who have a high self-esteem. (Macklin p. 170)



Role Models in the Media



- The body type that models and celebrities have can only be had by 5% of women – not a body type that a person can just 'dial' into. And if the model (who happens to be crazy tall and thin) happens to have large breasts, they are almost always breast implants ... so really that body type cannot be reached by any woman in society. (Killing Us Softly 3)

The Media and its Message (cont)

Magazines

- Seventeen magazine was referred to as the 'best friend' of high school girls. (Macklin p. 168)
- Magazine covers: 78% had teasers about appearance, diet and exercise, where as none of the popular magazines for men mentioned these topics. (Etough & Bridges p. 43)
- Seventeen: only 46% of the articles discussed self and career development. The rest dealt with appearance and relationships. (Etough & Bridges p. 42)



Role Models in the Media (cont)

Body Image

- Average height and weight of models: 5'11" and 110 lbs.
- Average height and weight of women: 5'4" and 145 lbs. (Reviving Ophelia VHS)
- In 1985 the average fashion model was a size 8, and in 2002 the average size was between a 6 and 2. (Etough & Bridges p. 128)
- 1/3 of Playboy centerfold models meet the World Health Organization's criteria for anorexia nervosa. (Etough & Bridges p. 43)



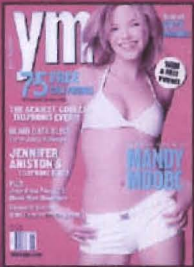
Negative Effects of Images

Body Image

- #1 wish of girls: To Be Thinner (Reviving Ophelia)
- 45% of girls and boys grades 3-6 have a desire to be thinner.
- 37% have tried to lose weight.
- 6.9% scored within the anorexia nervosa range.
- 43% of girls grades 1-3 preferred thinner ideal figures than their own.



Negative Effects of Images (cont')



Body Image (cont')

- Within 3 minutes of looking at fashion magazines, 70% of women feel guilty, ashamed, and depressed
- The more TV and magazines a girl is exposed to, the more likely she is to have an eating disorder (Reviving Ophelia)
- Young girls who read popular fashion magazines are more likely to use extreme dieting methods than those who do not read them. (Eliaugh & Bridges p. 128)

So What Can We Do About It?

- *We need to help our youth, and ourselves, think independently. This is the only way to conquer the issues that are being created by the images the media is sending us and the peer pressure that is being created in middle schools and high schools all across the country.*

Negative Effects of Images (cont')

Sexuality

- The media values sexy women, which teaches young girls that it's important for them to be sexually attractive, and if the girl doesn't happen to feel sexy, then she feels bad about herself and feels left out of something very important (Reviving Ophelia)
- 70% of girls wish they had waited longer before first having sex
- % of teens having sex has risen



So What Can We Do About It?



- Girls who stay involved in sports and girls who are involved in volunteer work are not as strongly affected by the media's images
- Stop praising girls for being 'cute' and instead concentrate on their accomplishments
- Boys' compliments are especially influential on young girls

How Boys Are Affected

- Boys constantly see images of made-up, non-cultural women.
- Boys intake the messages from the media just like girls.
- Guys expect women in their lives (especially their girlfriends) to look a certain way. (AAJNW p. 11)
- Boys think that the most important thing in a date is physical attractiveness (Reviving Ophelia)



So What Can We Do About It?

- *"Cultural change is a million acts of individual courage and kindness. That's the only way our culture has ever changed and it's the only way it will change."* (Reviving Ophelia)